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TAGS: [KPAO](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [EG](#)
SUBJECT: EGYPT'S NEW PRESS SYNDICATE CHAIRMAN OUTLINES
OBJECTIVES

REF: A. CAIRO 3299
[1](#)B. CAIRO 2835
[1](#)C. CAIRO 2825

Sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

[1](#)1. (SBU) We met on December 12 with Makhram Mohamed Ahmed, the new chairman of Egypt's influential press syndicate (ref A). Ahmed told us he has two immediate objectives as chairman; 1) to open a dialogue with the government that will end the prosecution of journalists, and 2) to enhance the professionalism of syndicate members. He also expressed his high regard for the work USAID has done with the Egyptian press and hopes this will continue.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Four independent editors are now appealing convictions and one-year prison sentences for criticizing President Mubarak and senior government officials (ref B). One of the four faces additional charges for publishing stories regarding President Mubarak's health (ref C). Ahmed told us he sees dialogue with the government, rather than confrontation, as the solution to these cases. He also criticized the government for pursuing these cases. He said the President received bad advice, and "nobody" anticipated the world-wide attention the cases attracted (which he contrasted with the favorable press other Arab countries (e.g. Jordan) received for repealing laws allowing the imprisonment of journalists). He said this is a good time to begin a dialogue with the government because "the President was very angry (about the editors) two months ago, but his mood had changed."

[1](#)3. (SBU) Ahmed sees improving the professionalism of Egyptian journalists as his other immediate objective. Ahmed lamented that the number of newcomers to the profession had in recent years grown so large that there were not enough seasoned journalists to properly train younger journalists. He said that inexperienced journalists have difficulty distinguishing between news and rumors, and only pursue one side of a story. They are often pushed by the "businessmen" who own news outlets to pursue sensational stories. We asked about a code of responsibility or ethics for journalists, and Ahmed said that such a code is contained in the syndicate's charter, but the board has never enforced it out of fear of alienating members and losing votes in subsequent elections.

[1](#)4. (SBU) Ahmed concluded the meeting by praising USAID's work with Egyptian journalists. He said he hoped to work through Minister for International Cooperation Fayza Aboul Naga to continue the cooperation. He also said he hoped for continued dialogue with the U.S. Embassy.
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